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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
FOX CONNER AND DWIGHT EISENHOWER

BY

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOX CONNER AND DWIGHT EISENHOWER

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## ABSTRACT

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Under the heading, "direct leader actions" the United States Army Field Manual 22-100 defines mentoring as the "proactive development of each subordinate through observing, assessing, coaching, teaching, developmental counseling, and evaluating that results in people being treated with fairness and equal opportunity." Mentoring, on this definition, is an inclusive process (not an exclusive one) for everyone under a leader's charge. A common definition describes a mentor as a trusted counselor or guide. The idea of mentoring has many definitions and interpretations. Each individual asked will provide a different definition of mentoring. The relationship between Fox Conner and Dwight Eisenhower is held up as an excellent example of "mentoring" by many who study the subject. This paper will delineate their relationship and explore each type of relationship they shared. The many types of relationships will then be compared to the Army's definition of mentoring as a direct leader action and assess whether their relationship was one of mentoring or something deeper. Lastly, specific lessons from the relationship between Conner and Eisenhower that can serve leaders today will be highlighted. This paper will demonstrate that the relationship between Fox Conner and Dwight Eisenhower exceeded FM 22-100's definition of mentoring, under the Direct Leader Actions Chapter. It is obvious that because of their mutual respect and admiration, their relationship grew beyond purely professional.



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Mentoring is demanding business, but the future of the Army depends on the trained and effective leaders whom you leave behind.<sup>1</sup>

— FM 22-100

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOX CONNER AND DWIGHT EISENHOWER

The purpose of this paper is to identify and analyze the relationship between Fox Conner and Dwight Eisenhower. Was it a true “mentoring” relationship or was it something else? How did they meet? What forms did their relationship take through the years? What can one derive from their relationship that is beneficial today? This paper will demonstrate the relationship between Fox Conner and Dwight Eisenhower exceeded the current Army definition of mentoring as a direct leadership action.

### BACKGROUND

#### MENTORING

Mentoring is a term derived from the Greek language and Greek mythology. Prior to departing for the Trojan Wars, Homer's Odysseus asked his trusted friend, Mentor, to tutor and guide his son, Telemachus, until he returned. Mentor provided Telemachus with all the education and guidance necessary to assume his place in society at that time. Mentoring has come to mean a relationship between a person with more experience (mentor) and a person with less experience (mentee) where the senior member plays a major role in shaping and molding the younger person's professional career. A commonly accepted definition of mentor is a trusted counselor or guide, a tutor or coach. The United States Army Field Manual 22-100 states that mentoring under the heading direct leadership action is: “the proactive development of each subordinate through observing, assessing, coaching, teaching, developmental counseling, and evaluating the results in people being treated with fairness and equal opportunity.”<sup>2</sup> Clearly Fox Conner was the senior member in the relationship with Dwight Eisenhower.

#### FOX CONNER

Fox Conner was born in Slate Springs, Mississippi in 1874. He graduated from the United States Military Academy in the class of 1898. He was commissioned in the Artillery and assigned to 2<sup>nd</sup> Artillery. His service included multiple batteries until January 1899, when Conner was sent to the Occupation Forces in Havana, Cuba. There he was promoted to First Lieutenant. Returning from Cuba, he served at Washington Barracks, received his promotion to

Captain, and served as a Commander of the 123<sup>rd</sup> Company, Coast Artillery. Fox Conner attended the Army Staff College at Fort Leavenworth in 1904 - 1905 and the Army War College 1907 – 1908. After staying at the War College as an instructor for four years, Conner was reassigned to the French Army as a liaison officer. This assignment was a pivotal point for Conner and led to his being sought by General John J. Pershing to serve on the American Expeditionary Force Staff in France. During the war Conner was promoted to temporary Brigadier General and subsequently reverted to Colonel in 1919. Following the war, Fox Conner was serving as the Chief of Staff, American Expeditionary Forces, Washington D.C. and it was during this assignment that he met Eisenhower.

#### DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

Dwight D. Eisenhower was born in Denison, Texas in 1890. He graduated from the United States Military Academy in the class of 1915. Eisenhower was commissioned in the Infantry and assigned to Fort Sam Houston, Texas where among other duties he served as an Inspector Instructor of a National Guard regiment. When the 19<sup>th</sup> Regiment was split to also form the 57<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Eisenhower was moved to the 57<sup>th</sup> and served to build the unit and train them. He was promoted to Captain during that assignment, and was then assigned to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia as an instructor of candidates for commission in 1917. Only five months later, Eisenhower received orders to report to Camp Meade, Maryland. However, the War Department changed his orders, sending him instead to Camp Colt, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The War Department had decided to reorganize its armored units, taking them away from the 65<sup>th</sup> Engineers and to give them an organization of their own, the Tank Corps, which Eisenhower then commanded. Eisenhower was promoted to lieutenant colonel (temporary) in October 1918; however, he was reverted to Captain following the war (1920). The ending of the war brought changes to the tank corps that resulted in Eisenhower's reassignment to Camp Dix, New Jersey, then to Fort Benning, Georgia only to return to Camp Meade, Maryland in the fall of 1919.

#### THE MEETINGS

##### GEORGE S. PATTON, JR.

Major Eisenhower was second in command of the 305<sup>th</sup> Tank Brigade at Camp Meade, Maryland. It was here that he met George S. Patton, Jr., commanding officer of 304<sup>th</sup> Tank Brigade. While they were very different, they shared a love for tanks. They became friends and spent much of the next year together. Their time was spent on tank warfare, trying and testing

new methodology. Both prepared articles on their findings for publication in military journals. Eisenhower states in his book, At Ease, that he was called before the Chief of Infantry regarding his article and told his ideas were not only wrong but also dangerous. He was told to keep them to himself for face a court-martial.<sup>3</sup> This is important because, as a result of that article, Eisenhower's relationship with Infantry Branch and Fort Benning deteriorated. The resulting negative relationship produced roadblocks for Eisenhower's future assignments.

## FOX CONNER

Through Eisenhower's relationship with Patton he met Fox Conner in the fall of 1920. Patton had known Conner since 1905 and had served with him in France during World War I. Patton introduced Eisenhower to Conner one evening when he invited both to dinner at his home. After dinner, the men discussed military subjects, specifically tank warfare. Eisenhower found support and interest in his ideas from General Fox Conner. Conner was impressed by Eisenhower and his forward thinking.<sup>4</sup> The evening ended and Eisenhower heard from Conner some months later. Conner invited Eisenhower to serve in the 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade in Panama as his Executive Officer. Eisenhower was excited about the offer saying, "I knew it would be an opportunity to have a tour of service with such a man. General Conner's reputation was splendid: he was one of the Army 'brains'."<sup>5</sup> Eisenhower eventually was reassigned to Panama, but not without challenges. These challenges were overcome by Conner's assistance. The assistance provided by Conner will be discussed later in this paper.

## RELATIONSHIPS

### TEACHER – STUDENT

The teacher–student relationship that Conner and Eisenhower shared is by far the most famous and most cited in the area of military mentoring. This relationship began when Eisenhower reported to Panama. Eisenhower's assignment as Conner's brigade executive officer at Camp Gaillard in Panama began a significant transition in Eisenhower's professional education. This professional development began immediately upon his arrival to Panama.<sup>6</sup> Eisenhower was not a diligent student at West Point. He enjoyed poker, playing football, and often found himself in trouble. In Eisenhower's own words, "As has been noted elsewhere, I was, in matters of discipline, far from a good cadet. I didn't think of myself as either a scholar whose position would depend on the knowledge he had acquired in school, or as a military figure whose professional career might be seriously affected by his academic or disciplinary record."<sup>7</sup> Conner believed differently.

Conner discovered Eisenhower's distaste for military history, based on the tedious memorization requirements at West Point, and began to teach Eisenhower the implications of such history. Conner offered Eisenhower numerous books from his library, to include Clausewitz' On War, Winston Churchill's The Crises, Mary Johnston's The Long Roll, and The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard in the Napoleonic Wars. Conner questioned his pupil about the books he read, the decisions of the commanders in the past, the alternatives available to them, and the conditions of each situation. Ike would describe his tutelage as "a sort of graduate school in military affairs and the humanities, leavened by the comments and discourses of a man who was experienced in his knowledge of men and their conduct."<sup>8</sup> Conner seemed to genuinely care about Eisenhower's understanding of the reading and caused him to think about it by endlessly questioning him. They spent numerous hours together in Panama enabling them to go into many subjects in great detail. Conner was a teacher for Eisenhower. He knew the subjects and imparted his knowledge to Eisenhower by guiding him and causing him to think through the issues. According to historian Stephen Ambrose, "under Conner's direction, Eisenhower found a sense of purpose. For the first time he became a serious student of his profession, which he found to his delight was truly interesting and exciting."<sup>9</sup>

Another story commonly cited as an example of the teacher-student relationship between Fox Conner and Dwight Eisenhower centers around Eisenhower's attendance at the Army War College in 1928. This story serves no relevance to the Conner-Eisenhower relationship.<sup>10</sup>

#### FATHER FIGURE

A "father figure" is a person often of particular influence who serves as an emotional substitute for a father. Carlo D'Este in his book, A Genius for War, points out that Conner became Eisenhower's teacher and a father figure whom he admired above all others.<sup>11</sup> Eisenhower became very close with Conner. He had a great admiration for the type of man that Conner was.

The Eisenhower's lost their firstborn son to scarlet fever in January 1921. The boy's death was devastating to both of them. Eisenhower's work was not an escape for him although he buried himself in it. He and Mamie Eisenhower's relationship was strained. They went to Panama in January 1922. Conner pulled Eisenhower out of the lethargy that had threatened to engulf him after his tank ideas had been so coldly rejected and after Icky's (Eisenhower's son) death, according to the historian, Stephen Ambrose.<sup>12</sup> Conner succeeded in distracting Eisenhower, at the same time encouraging him. Robert Burk in his book, Dwight D. Eisenhower: Hero and Politician, states Eisenhower enjoyed a close, almost father-son

relationship. Burk points out that Panama proved to be just the personal and professional tonic Eisenhower needed following his frustrations in the states and the death of his son.<sup>13</sup>

Eisenhower did not have a strained relationship with his own father, David J. Eisenhower. However, the stronger influence in his life came from his mother. In his book, At Ease, Eisenhower describes his father as quiet and modest.<sup>14</sup> While they seemed to care for each other, Eisenhower did not characterize the relationship as close or one in which they would share ideas. He was very close to his mother and devotes an entire chapter of At Ease to her. He writes of his father's death, "I'm proud he was my father. My only regret is that it was always so difficult to let him know the great depth of my affection for him."<sup>15</sup> Eisenhower's relationship with Conner provided a comradeship that both officers benefited from, especially Eisenhower. Piers Brendon in IKE: His Life and Times, wrote that Conner became for Ike not only a patron and teacher, but also something of a father figure. In 1933 Eisenhower wrote in his diary of Conner,

"A wonderful officer and leader with a splendid analytical mind. He is loyal to his subordinates as to superiors (and is quick to give credit to juniors).... I served as his brigade exec for 3 years in Panama and never enjoyed any other 3-year period as much. Devoted to his family and to the service, he is a credit to both as well as his country. He held a place in my affections for many years that no other, not even a relative, could obtain."<sup>16</sup>

That statement sums up the deep feelings Eisenhower had for Fox Conner.

## FRIEND

A friend is one attached to another by affection or esteem, or an acquaintance. Conner and Eisenhower were definitely friends. In fact, they were close friends. This friendship began and flourished in Panama. Eisenhower's assignment to Panama was to serve as the Brigade Executive Officer under Conner who was the Brigade Commander. They were somewhat close in age, Conner was 46 and Eisenhower was 31. However, their age difference of 15 years is at the upper range of a "typical" mentor relationship. According to the authors of *Leaders as Mentors*, Military Review (July 1985), research indicates that mentors are typically eight to 15 years older than their protégés.<sup>17</sup> They were not close in rank, as Conner was a Brigadier General and Eisenhower was a Major, and there was a vast difference in experience between the two. Conner was a very senior officer in the Army at that time and had served 24 years. Eisenhower was a Major and had served only seven years. Their relationship started as senior to subordinate and migrated to teacher-student. Their discovery of common opinions, likes and

dislikes, sheer enjoyment of “brainstorming” military issues or philosophy, and mutual respect, led to their friendship.

In Panama, Conner and Eisenhower were neighbors. Their homes were side by side. According to the authors of Ike and Mamie, the General and his wife had developed a special interest in the youthful couple.<sup>18</sup> The Conners knew the Eisenhowers were facing a critical time in their marriage (the loss of their son) and they wanted to help. In Ike and Mamie, Virginia Conner is depicted as a motherly woman, who saw that Mamie was troubled, spent as much time with her as she could, talking to her, drawing her out, and – most importantly – advising her.<sup>19</sup> The wives became very close friends. Stephen Ambrose wrote in Eisenhower: Soldier and President that Mamie called on Virginia Conner daily and that she became her confidante and adviser. When Mamie complained about some of her difficulties with her husband, Mrs. Conner was forthright in her advice. She told Mamie to cut her hair, change her clothes, brighten herself up. “You mean I should vamp him?” Mamie asked. “That’s just what I mean,” Mrs. Conner replied. “Vamp him!”<sup>20</sup>

The officers shared long daily horse rides together, checking on the trails along the canal. It was during these rides that they became closer. In fact the two were so in tune with each other, that other officers took notice. Robert Burk points out in his book, Dwight D. Eisenhower: Hero and Politician that Eisenhower became a kind of “junior Conner,” which irritated his officer colleagues. Brigadier General (Retired) Bradford G. Chenowyth was stationed in Panama with Eisenhower and Conner. When describing the instruction given to the officers, Chenowyth stated, “The Conner-Ike regime handled it more like the yearling corporal handling plebes.”<sup>21</sup> Eisenhower enforced Conner’s policies, as an Executive Officer should, and many of the officers felt Eisenhower was a courtier or spy for Conner. Chenowyth questioned Eisenhower on why he didn’t support the other officers when they disagreed with Conner over one of his policies. According to Chenowyth, Eisenhower replied that when he arrives at a new station, he looks to see who is the strongest and ablest and that he forgets his own ideas and does everything in his power to promote what that person says is right. Chenowyth said “Eisenhower was like an actor who accepts the role given him by the director. Of course it is politic for the courtier to agree with the monarch.”<sup>22</sup> Chenowyth describes a circumstance in which Fox Conner believed that the court martial process was an instrument of his policy and that Conner ordered them what sentences to inflict. According to Chenowyth, Conner stated “If you don’t vote as I direct, I will know exactly who voted wrong.” Chenowyth stated “We knew exactly who the ‘spy’ was to tell Fox how we voted. I (Chenowyth) told Ike openly that while I wanted to

back the Commanding General, I would not relinquish my duty to vote on courts according to my own conscience."<sup>23</sup>

The two men were marvelously congenial, and found time to go off on long fishing expeditions as well as to make an agreeable social life for themselves. But they talked soldiering interminably.<sup>24</sup> They frequented each other's homes. Virginia Conner noted, "I never saw two men more congenial than Ike Eisenhower and my husband. They spent hours discussing wars, past and future...Ike has often said that my husband had more influence on him than any officer he served under."<sup>25</sup> Their friendship displayed itself not only through their professional relationship but also through their personal relationship.

## ASSIGNMENTS OFFICER

### **Panama**

When Eisenhower approached his commanding officer about the offer from Fox Conner to go to Panama with him, he was met with a lack of support. Eisenhower states in At Ease that his commander had few experienced field officers and could not spare him. Carlo D'Este in A Genius for War, states that General Samuel Rockenbach, Eisenhower's commanding general at the time, refused to release him for another reason: since in 1919 Eisenhower had successfully coached the Tank School football team. Retaining a top-notch football coach in the 1920s was considered as important as being successful in one's other duties.<sup>26</sup> In Mark Bender's Watershed at Leavenworth, an investigation involving Eisenhower and \$250.67 was listed as part of the reason Eisenhower could not get released to Panama. The Inspector General of the Army was unwilling to release Eisenhower. What happened next was the first of many steps that Fox Conner would take to assist Eisenhower in his assignments. Fox Conner contacted General John J. Pershing, who had recently become Chief of Staff of the Army, requesting Eisenhower's reassignment. The relationship between Pershing and Conner dated back to 1917. The Inspector General, Brigadier General Eli Helmick, had been friends with the previous Chief of Staff but was not close with Pershing. According to Merle Miller in Ike the Soldier, Helmick wanted another star to take him into retirement. So, Helmick retreated; he was no longer the Grand Inquisitor so far as Eisenhower was concerned. Helmick had done a complete about-face. In his earlier reports he had stated that Eisenhower's claim "that he was ignorant of the provision of the law governing commutations for dependents" was "inexplicable"; now he was saying lack of knowledge must be "weighed in his favor."<sup>27</sup> Eisenhower received a written reprimand and his orders reassigning him to Panama in January 1922.

## Command and General Staff School

Fox Conner came to Eisenhower's rescue once more, enabling him to attend the Command and General Staff School. When the time came for Eisenhower to leave Panama, he anxiously awaited orders. Eisenhower submitted a request with Conner's endorsement to attend the Command and General Staff School. To date he had only attended the Infantry Tank School and needed an exception to policy to attend the Command and General Staff School. The orders he received were assigning him back to Camp Meade to coach football. These orders were a temporary duty until after the football season. His permanent orders assigned him to command the same tank battalion he commanded previously.

Eisenhower stated in At Ease that he had an approved leave prior to the orders starting, giving him time to see the Chief of Infantry. His hopes were to get the orders changed so he could attend an established Army school. Eisenhower was decidedly unhappy with the results of his visit: "I should have known better; he refused even to listen to my arguments, and said I would have to go to Benning to command the light tank battalion."<sup>28</sup> Fox Conner was also in Washington at this time, serving as Deputy Chief of Staff for the Army. Conner's office was located in the same building as the Chief of Infantry. Mark Bender, in Watershed at Leavenworth, surmises that Eisenhower most likely stopped to see Conner after his visit with the Chief of Infantry. Given their knowledge of each other, Eisenhower probably explained his unhappiness to Conner. In fact, Eisenhower stated in At Ease that Conner knew of his disappointment in not getting detailed to the Infantry School at Fort Benning.

Shortly after returning to Camp Meade from his Washington visit, Eisenhower received a telegram that read: "NO MATTER WHAT ORDERS YOU RECEIVE FROM THE WAR DEPARTMENT, MAKE NO PROTEST ACCEPT THEM WITHOUT QUESTION SIGNED CONNNER."<sup>29</sup> Eisenhower soon received orders for recruiting duty in Colorado. According to Edgar Puryear in Nineteen Stars, because of a dispute with the Chief of Infantry over the use of tanks, the then Major Eisenhower was apparently going to miss the chance to attend Leavenworth. Fox Conner, who appreciated the value of the school, decided to intervene. He had Eisenhower transferred to the Adjutant General's Department.<sup>30</sup> Edgar Puryear goes on to explain that The Adjutant General had two quotas per year for the Command and General Staff School and as a favor to Conner, gave Eisenhower one of those openings.

To Eisenhower's credit, he had no previous knowledge of Conner's manipulation of the assignments process. Eisenhower felt being assigned to recruiting duty was something just short of a reprimand. Once Eisenhower discovered that Conner went behind the back of the Chief of Infantry, he was rightfully concerned. "Had anyone else suggested to me that I desert

an arm for a service, I would have been outraged. Now it had been done without consultation. But with my solid belief in Fox Conner, I kept my temper.<sup>31</sup> This covert assignment did further damage to Eisenhower's relationship with the Chief of Infantry. Eisenhower states in At Ease, that an aide to the Chief of Infantry wrote, advising him to stay away from Command and General Staff School, because "you will probably fail," and the failure would make him useless as an infantry officer, condemning him forever to a life of coaching inferior football players.<sup>32</sup> Eisenhower did check with Conner to ensure that he was ready for the school and Conner reassured him, explaining that everything he did in Panama prepared him for the school. Fortunately, Eisenhower paid no credence to the aide's remarks. He graduated first in his class.

### **The War Department**

Graduating first in the Command and General Staff School did not help Eisenhower on his next assignment. Eisenhower was being considered to go back to Fort Benning and command a battalion. The Command and General Staff School Commandant, General Edward King, was considering Eisenhower for an instructor position in the school. Eisenhower was also offered the opportunity to be a Reserve Officer Training Corps instructor at a northwestern university with an offer to also coach football, for additional money. After considering the options and getting word through General King that the War Department was anxious for him to proceed to Benning, Eisenhower proceeded to Fort Benning.<sup>33</sup> Eisenhower's patience was tested once again when he was told he would coach the soldier football team.

At the end of the football season, Conner again came to Eisenhower's rescue. During this timeframe, Congress had authorized the creation of the Battle Monuments Commission. The commission had the responsibility to compile a guide to American battle sites in World War I. General John J. Pershing, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, was in charge of the commission. Once again Fox Conner used his influence, and in January 1927 Ike was transferred to Washington to work for the formidable General "Black Jack" Pershing, who was head of the Battle Monuments Commission.<sup>34</sup> The assignment was short lived because Eisenhower was selected to attend the War College. Following the War College, Eisenhower returned to the Battle Monuments Commission to work on revising the previously written guidebook.

### **ADVISOR**

In the years following Ike's assignment to the Battle Monuments Commission, there is very little reference to Fox Conner. Eisenhower would later work for General George C. Marshall. Eisenhower had many confidantes through those years, Marshall being one. It can

be assumed that Eisenhower did remain in some form of contact with Conner, however intermittent. Merle Miller states in *Ike: The Soldier, As They Knew Him*, that "almost 20 years after their tour together in Panama Fox Conner was writing Eisenhower, in 1942, with advice for a cross channel landing. Advice that Eisenhower accepted and supported." Eisenhower did confide in his advisor during World War II. On 4 July 1942, several days after he received his appointment as commanding general, European Theater of Operations, Eisenhower wrote Conner, "I cannot tell you how much I would appreciate, at this moment, an opportunity for an hour's discussion with you on the problems that beset me...the same problems (coalition warfare) that you faced twenty-five years ago... recently I've been so frequently struck by the similarity between this situation and the one you used to describe to me."<sup>35</sup>

Eisenhower would recall many of the things that he and Conner discussed in Panama throughout his life. Their talks around the campfire ranged far afield. Conner liked to hand down axioms such as "Always take your job seriously, never yourself" or "All generalities are false, including this one."<sup>36</sup> Eisenhower reflected on these axioms occasionally as noted in his book, *At Ease*. Conner's warning of a second World War that would require an allied force stayed with Eisenhower throughout World War II.

## MENTORING IN TODAY'S ARMY

The United States Army Field Manual 22-100 defines mentoring, under the Direct Leadership Actions Chapter, as the proactive development of each subordinate. Mentoring is an inclusive process (not an exclusive one) for everyone under a leader's charge. The FM explains that observing, assessing, and evaluating occur while the leader (mentor) is "operating" or accomplishing the daily duties and applies them to individual subordinates, thus improving the subordinate leader's actions. According to the FM, mentoring techniques include teaching, developmental counseling, and coaching.<sup>37</sup>

## TEACHING

FM 22-100 states that teaching gives knowledge or provides skills to others, causing them to learn by example or experience.<sup>38</sup> The passing of knowledge and skills to subordinates can take many forms and occur in many settings. These range from formal classroom to an exchange of information during a vehicle ride. The FM focuses teaching on technical and tactical skills. The Conner-Eisenhower relationship definitely conforms to the idea of teaching as a mentoring skill.

As delineated above, Fox Conner was truly a "teacher" for Dwight Eisenhower. The foci of his lessons were military history, tactics, philosophy, and the humanities. Much of the

discussion between the two occurred while riding horses throughout Panama or in the evenings when they camped. Conner required Eisenhower to submit a daily five-paragraph field order, teaching Eisenhower another required skill. Eisenhower wrote Conner sharing his concerns about being prepared for the Command and General Staff Officer Course. Conner replied stating that "you may not know it, but because of your three years' work in Panama, you are far better trained and ready for Leavenworth than anybody I know."<sup>39</sup>

## DEVELOPMENTAL COUNSELING

FM 22-100 defines developmental counseling as subordinate-centered communication that produces a plan outlining actions necessary for subordinates to achieve individual or organizational goals. It states that developmental counseling isn't a time for war stories or for tales of how things were done way back when. It specifies that the mentor's counseling program should include all subordinates, not just the ones you think have the most potential.

Conner's counseling of Eisenhower doesn't fit the "mold" outlined in the current FM 22-100. The similarities exist in Conner's constant feedback to Eisenhower while discussing various books, war plans or ideas that Eisenhower proposed. The only references to career counseling provided by Conner were evident in his guidance: work for Marshall; prepare for a second world war using an allied force; and the assistance Conner provided on his assignments. None of these examples fit the FM's meaning of developmental counseling. It was evident from the research that Conner held Eisenhower in special regard in comparison to his other officers. According to Merle Miller's Ike the Soldier, Conner was harsh; some people, junior officers especially, thought too harsh. A few considered him a martinet. Colonel Clarence Deems, Jr., who served with Conner, said he was "of the hard-boiled type--a Prussian in spirit. He was always right in his own estimation and did not seem to realize that others had their good points, too. He engendered antagonism, and in it the underlying feeling of that kind of loyalty that was enforced only, and not given in the outpouring of comradely affection."<sup>40</sup> Eisenhower's special relationship with Conner never revealed anything but pure respect and a desire to please and learn. According to Mrs. Conner, "Ike had continually to follow up on his (Conner's) orders to see that they were obeyed." That did not make him popular with fellow officers and the enlisted men. Merle Miller points out in Ike the Soldier, that Captain Rickard, who served in Plans and Training at Gaillard, and Captain James P. Murphy, who served as adjutant of the 42<sup>nd</sup> (in Panama), both resented and disliked Eisenhower.<sup>41</sup> One can only assume that Conner did not counsel or spend equal amounts of time with his other subordinate officers as he did with Eisenhower.

## COACHING

According to FM 22-100, coaching involves a leader's assessing performance based on observations, helping the subordinate develop an effective plan of action to sustain strengths and overcome weaknesses, and supporting the subordinate and the plan.<sup>42</sup> Specifically, coaching follows naturally from assessing leader action and providing instant counseling.

Based on the research, one can conclude that much of the exchange between Conner and Eisenhower was in a coaching context. While Conner taught Eisenhower about events and the historical significance of those events, he coached him through the scenarios, encouraging him to think of alternative ideas. Conner provided feedback to Eisenhower. His highest praise was "Eisenhower, you handled that just the way Marshall would have done."<sup>43</sup> The guidance he provided Eisenhower prepared him for his future assignments and supported both the individual and the organization's goals. Conner was a coach for Eisenhower.

## OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

The other relationships - father figure, friend and assignments office - that were held by Conner and Eisenhower, far exceed the definition of mentor as outlined by FM 22-100. It is clear that the relationships of father figure and friend were unique to their overall mutual respect and admiration. The relationship of Conner as an advisor to Eisenhower is not unlike current relationships between officers today. The relationship of assignments officer can have negative results. On this point, the authors of "Leaders as Mentors" explain:

The primary role of Army mentors is clearly that of a coach and not a sponsor. Certainly, a mentor may have a profound effect on the careers of their protégés when they intervene to ensure that their protégés obtain desirable assignments. However, such a sponsorship role is not a desirable aspect of Army mentorship because it results in perceptions of favoritism, elitism and promotion by riding the coattails of influential senior officers. This type of mentorship cannot be condoned in the Army.<sup>44</sup>

The relationships experienced by Conner and Eisenhower were forged during a period of time during which one was subordinate to the other. The education and coaching that Conner provided were in keeping with the Army's definition of mentoring. The deeper relationships of father figure and friend reach beyond a line that is drawn between subordinates and superiors. The relationship of assignments officer does not fit any criteria of mentoring in FM 22-100. While the relationship of advisor is not specifically outlined in the FM, it is not uncommon between officers who have worked together and respect each other's advice.

## STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

FM 22-100's Chapter on Strategic Leadership outlines mentoring differently than its definition of mentoring in the previous Direct Leadership Actions Chapter. The manual states that mentoring by strategic leaders means giving the right people an intellectual boost so that they make the leap to operations and thinking at the highest levels. Strategic leaders aim not only to pass on knowledge but also to grow wisdom in those they mentor. The leaders show their protégés what to study, where to focus, whom to watch, and how to proceed. Lastly, strategic leaders spend time, sharing their perspectives with those who haven't yet reached the highest levels of Army leadership.<sup>45</sup> This type of mentoring is exclusive to the individuals the mentor believes are the "right people."

The information Fox Conner shared with Dwight Eisenhower fits within the guidelines of Strategic Leadership as outlined by FM 22-100. The instruction provided by Conner on field orders, history, and campaign planning more than prepared him for the Command and General Staff Officers Course. Conner passed great wisdom to Eisenhower in the areas of problem solving and dealing with people. His forecast of a future world war, fought by allies, and the need for Eisenhower to serve with George Marshall benefited Eisenhower later in his career. Conner urged Ike to be ready for it (another great war) and as part of his professional readiness, suggested he (Ike) try for an assignment under Colonel George Catlett Marshall. "In the new war we will have to fight beside allies," Conner told Ike, "and George Marshall knows more about techniques of arranging allied commands than any man I know."<sup>46</sup> As previously stated, Conner spent a great deal of time with Eisenhower sharing his perspectives. Conner's actions were consistent with the FM's definition for strategic mentoring; however, their relationship far exceeded that same definition.

## SUMMARY

Dwight Eisenhower's career was definitely impacted by his relationship with Fox Conner. Their time together in Panama forged a relationship that for years would serve Eisenhower and the Army well. The mutual respect and admiration they had was a foundation for the many relationships they experienced.

As a student under Conner, Eisenhower was eager to learn and blossomed with Conner's tutelage. Conner was there for Eisenhower after he experienced the sudden blow of his son's premature death, helping him recover like any father would for his child. They were friends and that friendship produced frankness in their discussions, and a bond of trust. Conner's impact on Eisenhower's assignments gave Eisenhower an edge over his peers. While Eisenhower rose to

the challenge of whatever assignment given, Conner's interventions produced some negative affects that Eisenhower had to deal with, especially with Infantry Branch. On balance however, the advice Eisenhower received from Conner served him well throughout his professional career and personal life.

There are many benefits that can be derived today from studying their relationship. First, the term mentoring must be reviewed, and a determination made of what mentoring really is and what the Army expects of its officers, at all levels. Much of what Conner provided Eisenhower was the product of good leadership. Leadership is not mentoring but mentoring can be part of good leadership. It is a leader's responsibility to train, develop, and care for his/her subordinates...all of them. That does not mean the leader will have a quality mentoring relationship with all of them. An effective mentoring relationship is based on a foundation of mutual respect for each other and a genuine "like" for one another. Leadership cannot force a mentoring relationship on two people who don't get along...it won't work.

Secondly, friendships are likely to be derived from quality mentoring relationships. Both officers and the leadership must deal with this fact professionally. No one should take advantage of his or her relationship with another. However where favoritism is found and where it is harming the command climate, something must be done about it.

Thirdly, Conner's blatant manipulation of the assignments process should serve as an example of what senior leaders should not do concerning subordinate's assignments. It is possible that such assistance was not as serious then as it is today. Even today, if one sees a subordinate being discriminated against the human instinct and tendency is to help that individual. Conner's efforts definitely helped Eisenhower when it was clear that Infantry Branch was trying to hold him back. The problem arises when a senior officer interferes for one officer and other equally qualified officers are not helped. It creates animosity and leads to a breakdown in the chain of command. However, as one reviews the circumstances, no individual branch should have the power to mismanage an officer's career because that officer has unique ideas. Eisenhower, the Army, and the Nation clearly benefited from Conner's decisions. All officers should be given the opportunity to serve in challenging positions and attend the required military schools. Fairness must exist in the officer assignment system because it has a direct impact on soldier care and retention. It is more important to fix the system than to find ways to get around it. Until the system is fixed, leaders will continue to usurp the assignments process and only a select few will benefit from quality assignments.

Lastly, Conner's attention to Eisenhower was remarkable and something every officer would benefit from. Unfortunately, times have changed and we don't ride horses for long

periods of time with our superiors. In fact, most subordinates have very little time with their superiors. The higher one goes in the system, the less time you have. The current Officer Evaluation system with its required counseling and forms is supposed to improve the interaction between the rated officer, the rater, and the senior rater. But this is not enough because it works well for some but not for others. Leaders fear favoritism and other misperceptions. They don't spend adequate time with their subordinates. Some find the requirements too time consuming. A rater and senior rater must take the time to counsel their subordinates. More importantly they should spend time, other than formal counseling, guiding the officer and actually getting to know the officer.

When a lieutenant becomes a platoon leader, the first "mentor" should be the platoon sergeant. That noncommissioned officer must properly train the lieutenant. Noncommissioned officers play a vital role in developing lieutenants. They should provide the basic foundation of leadership for the young officer, teaching him/her how to lead. Noncommissioned officers must be empowered with the authority to develop the lieutenants. They must be held accountable for that development. Lieutenants must be trained to listen and learn from their platoon sergeant. The company commander and battalion commander should evaluate the young officer for potential and provide guidance on how to be an officer. It is important for battalion commanders to spend time developing their captains. Battalion executive officers are key to developing company executive officers. Officers should receive career guidance as senior first lieutenants, for as captains they will make decisions that will impact the rest of their careers. It is important for them to have someone, knowledgeable about the system, to provide guidance. While the people officers associate with most tend to be in the chain-of-command, it is important to understand that mentors can be found outside the chain-of-command, from a peer, or some other source.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the relationship between Fox Conner and Dwight Eisenhower was unique but it exceeds FM 22-100's definition of mentoring, under the Direct Leader Actions Chapter. Conner was a mentor as defined under FM 22-100's Strategic Leadership Chapter. It is obvious that because of their mutual respect and admiration, their relationship grew beyond purely professional. This is not the example the Army should use today as a "model" mentoring relationship because it would be impossible to duplicate repeatedly. In fact, one must remember that while Eisenhower learned a great deal from Conner, Conner was not the only

mentor Eisenhower had. Marshall, MacArthur, and Pershing, to name a few, also mentored Eisenhower. Eisenhower was a product of many of the best officers in the Army.

The Army should, however, clearly define what it means by mentoring and be very wary of forcing relationships that might be unhealthy. Providing guidance to all officers on career development, leadership, and other critical information is necessary and it does not take a "mentoring" relationship to fulfill the requirement. These are basic leadership tasks. Leaders who genuinely care about their subordinates will attempt to "mentor" their subordinates. The subordinates have a responsibility to ask questions and be receptive to the feedback they receive. If the relationship is an unhealthy one, then another senior officer should be available when the subordinate has additional questions. It is important for all leaders to understand they have an obligation to extend themselves to junior officers. They are there to teach, guide, advise, sponsor, serve as a role model, counsel, and motivate junior officers. This mentoring relationship, however, cannot usurp the senior-to-subordinate chain of command relationship.

Mentoring is not a difficult concept. The difficulty lies in trying to tie everything that is associated with leadership to mentoring. Requiring every officer to have a mentor and to be a mentor is doomed to fail. But that seems to be the direction the Army is going. Basic leadership and education are more important than every officer having a mentor. Fox Conner did not set out to "mentor" Eisenhower. He shared new perspectives on issues that Eisenhower found boring. Conner challenged Eisenhower. He shared numerous experiences with him, encouraging Eisenhower to think through and understand the situations. Conner taught Eisenhower how to think and reason, giving him an "intellectual boost so that he made the leap to operations and thinking at the highest levels."<sup>47</sup>

Fox Conner shared a close relationship with Dwight Eisenhower, exceeding the current Army definition of mentoring. Only the student-teacher relationship is congruent with FM 22-100's definition as a direct leader action. From their relationship we can derive the understanding that junior officers need guidance. They must be taught leadership and professional development. Lastly, leaders at all levels have basic leadership responsibilities to their subordinate officers.

WORD COUNT = 6,857

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Department of the Army, Army Leadership, Field Manual 22-100 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, August 1999), 5-18.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 5-16.

<sup>3</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, At Ease (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), 173.

<sup>4</sup> William F. Aldrich, Fox Conner, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 15 April 1993), 29.

<sup>5</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, At Ease (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), 178.

<sup>6</sup> William F. Aldrich, Fox Conner Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 15 April 1993), 30.

<sup>7</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, At Ease (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), 10, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Mark C. Bender, Watershed at Leavenworth (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1990), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, Ike / Abilene to Berlin, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), 56.

<sup>10</sup> An incident of supposed mentoring was introduced to the literature by Benjamin Franklin Cooling. Cooling cites that Major General Fox Conner served as a mentor to Eisenhower during his attendance at the Army War College and that he provided written guidance to Eisenhower on his thesis paper. This results from a confusion of identity between two different individuals, Major General Fox Conner and Major General William D. Connor. It was Major General William D. Connor, Army War College Commandant, who mentored Eisenhower. Benjamin Franklin Cooling, "Dwight D. Eisenhower at the Army War College, 1927 – 1928," Parameters 5, no. 1 (1975): 27-28; Mark C. Bender, Watershed at Leavenworth (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1990), 60.

<sup>11</sup> Carlo D'Este, A Genius for War (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 294.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, Eisenhower: Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect 1890 – 1952 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 76.

<sup>13</sup> Robert F. Burk, Dwight D. Eisenhower: Hero and Politician (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), 31.

<sup>14</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, At Ease (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), 304.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>16</sup> Merle Miller, Ike the Soldier (New York City: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1987), 208.

<sup>17</sup> Charles W. Bagnal, Earl C. Pence, and Thomas N. Meriwether, "Leaders as Mentors," Military Review (July 1985): 7.

<sup>18</sup> Lester David and Irene David, Ike and Mamie (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1981), 91.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, Eisenhower: Soldier and President (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 39.

<sup>21</sup> Bradford G. Chynoweth letter to Colonel George S. Pappas, 24 October 1967, Chynoweth Papers, Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, U.S. Army War College, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Piers Brendon, Ike: His Life and Times (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 53.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, Eisenhower: Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect 1890 – 1952 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 77.

<sup>26</sup> Carlo D'Este, A Genius for War (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 293.

<sup>27</sup> Merle Miller, Ike the Soldier (New York City: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1987), 203.

<sup>28</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, At Ease (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), 199.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Edgar F. Puryear, Jr., 19 (Nineteen) Stars: A Study in Military Character and Leadership (Novato: Presidio Press, 1988), 163.

<sup>31</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, At Ease (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), 200.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, Eisenhower: Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect 1890 – 1952 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 79.

<sup>33</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, At Ease (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), 203.

<sup>34</sup> Piers Brendon, Ike: His Life and Times (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 55.

<sup>35</sup> Cole C. Kingseed, "Mentoring General Ike," Military Review (October 1990): 29.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, Ike / Abilene to Berlin (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), 56.

<sup>37</sup> Department of the Army, Army Leadership, Field Manual 22-100 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, August 1999), 5-16 - 5-18.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 5-16.

<sup>39</sup> Mark C. Bender, Watershed at Leavenworth (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1990), 40.

<sup>40</sup> Merle Miller, Ike the Soldier (New York City: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1987), 209.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Department of the Army, Army Leadership, Field Manual 22-100 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, August 1999), 5-18.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, Eisenhower: Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect 1890 – 1952 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 76-77.

<sup>44</sup> Charles W. Bagnal, Earl C. Pence, and Thomas N. Meriwether, "Leaders as Mentors," Military Review (July 1985): 16-17.

<sup>45</sup> Department of the Army, Army Leadership, Field Manual 22-100 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, August 1999), 7-23.

<sup>46</sup> Merle Miller, Ike the Soldier (New York City: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1987), 212.

<sup>47</sup> Department of the Army, Army Leadership, Field Manual 22-100 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, August 1999), 7-23.



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